

Sir William Mure and the Covenant

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THE reign of Charles I presents a complex and at times blurred picture to the Scottish historian. As revolt accelerated into execution, situations and motivations changed with such speed, that a comprehensive assessment becomes difficult. Each strand of evidence is thus valuable, and the present study seeks to show the reactions of one Scot from 1629 till 1650.

Sir William Mure of Rowallan was a devout covenanter, a member of the Scottish Parliament from 1643 till 1646, and actively engaged in the battles fought by the Army of the Covenant. He was also a poet of some note, one of the last adherers to James VI's renaissance of Scottish poetry begun at the Edinburgh court in 1585. His views can thus be implied from his political and martial efforts, while being confirmed or developed by his verse.

He was born in 1594 and probably attended Glasgow University.¹ As heir to a large Ayrshire estate, he was comfortably off and appears to have settled into a pleasant domestic life with his first wife Anna Dundas. His early verse followed the Petrarchan love conventions of the day and is almost entirely uninspired. In the 1620s however he turned to religious themes, notably in *A Spirituall Hymne, Fancies Farewell and Doomesday*.² These works expose his faith as being very close to the ultra-Protestant position held by many Ayrshire families at that time, but they have little direct reference to contemporary political events.

In the late 1620s Charles I began tentatively to extend his father's policy of strengthened episcopal government in Scotland. He made his own veneration for bishops known and in 1629 asked to see the forgotten draft liturgy of 1618, presumably with a view to superseding it. His support for the growing band of Arminians in Scotland caused strict Protestants some concern. To them, any step in the direction of increased ritual or increased power for the bishops suggested Roman Catholicism. Mure was no exception and in 1629, he wrote a long poem *The True Crucifixe for True Catholickes*.³ It is a tedious, often careless work of 3,332 lines, heavily

¹ The evidence for this is inferential. See *The Works of Sir William Mure of Rowallan*, ed. William Tough, Scottish Text Society, 2 Vols. (Edinburgh and London, 1898), I, ix-xi.

² *Works of Mure*, I, 145-59; 195-6; 163-91.

³ *Works of Mure*, I, 197-298.

annotated with Biblical references. In fact it resembles a sermon as much as a work of art and this objection Mure foresees in his introduction. In countering it he confesses that the theme had been suggested to him by a neighbouring preacher, who also agreed "to furnish helpe to the materials."

His collaborator was almost certainly one of the staunch Protestant ministers in Ayrshire. His aim in prompting Mure to write a work which attacks ritual and idolatry was probably twofold. It might stem the growing Catholicism in Ayrshire at this time, but on a wider scale, it might warn the Church in Scotland to beware of Charles I's preferences for a less austere service. This is probably why a lengthy advocation of scripture rather than symbols, Christ rather than images, God rather than Pope, culminates with a piece of advice to Kings. The annotation is set beside the text, as was Mure's custom:

Kings and rulers may
learne their dutie by
looking upon Christ's
purtrate in the
Scripture.

As Subjects Him beholding humbled, see
A pearlesse Patterne of true loyaltie,
So Kings may looking on this King of Kings,
Who proudest Tyrants in subjection brings,
Learne to be truly Royall, Rule as Hee
To whom all earthly Monarchs vassels bee.¹

Mure's belief in Divine Right is clear throughout his works, but his criticism of Charles I, later developed in a parallel with the Biblical King David, is equally pointed. Charles puts too much emphasis on "purtrates" and too little on "scripture", on manner rather than message, on intermediaries rather than God. If he learns "God's law alone", seeking truth in the Bible, he will be a worthy King. The innuendo is obviously, that so far Charles with his interest in bishops and liturgies has been leaning heavily towards idolatry. The lesson is there for him to learn even at this date, but Charles was deaf to the plea.

The years leading to the Covenant confirmed Mure's worst fears. In 1633 the English Prayer Book was introduced into certain Scottish churches and 1634 saw the 1618 liturgy scrapped and a new one promised. A modified Prayer Book for use in Scotland was in preparation, and generally what Mure termed as worship of the "golden calf" seemed on the increase. Not surprisingly in 1635, he produced his second literary warning.

It took the form of 28 sonnets, called *The Joy of Teares*.² These were grouped into a dialogue between the poet and Christ. They have more

¹ *Works of Mure*, I, 292.

² *Miscellany Volume*, ed. C. Davis, Scottish Text Society (Edinburgh and London, 1933), pp. 163-178. They were discovered by Mr Davis in the British Museum, after Tough's edition came out. For convenience I have referred to isolated sonnets as J. T. 1, 2 etc.

literary value than *The True Crucifixe*, while being the last major sonneteering sequence during the sixty years of that genre's prominence in Scotland. Again Mure brings to his aid a detailed knowledge of the Bible, but his poem is this time much more of a coherent unity. It is held together by the conceit of tears and the view that if enough religious men weep, their grief will form a stream powerful enough to wash away iniquity. This grief is soon identified with the increase of "heresy" in the Scottish church:

- O captive Ark once free!
- Now Philistins with peace possesse; all my Excellencie is gone, I wish to die.¹

As we might expect there is a Biblical source for the idea. It is perhaps strange to find it in the twelfth book of Apocryphal Esther, when the Protestants were so intent on banishing Apocryphal passages from the Prayer Book. But this issue did not come to a head until 1637. After that year Mure seldom uses Apocryphal references, whereas earlier they had often been employed. The passage recounts the dream of Mordecai:

"The whole righteous nation was troubled; they feared the evils that threatened them, and were ready to perish. Then they cried to God; and from their cry, as though from a tiny spring, there came a great river, with abundant water; light came, and the sun rose, and the lowly were exalted and consumed those held in honour."²

In reminding the Scots of the power of tears, Mure is reminding them that the Jews were also oppressed, but were rescued by the tears of a loyal few. It is the technique of taking courage from the past as used by Barbour in his *Brus*. If Bruce could stop English oppression, so Barbour's contemporaries under David II could follow his example. If Esther and Mordecai could re-establish justice in the church, so could Mure's contemporaries under Charles I.

This idea underlies the whole poem, but the first movement is mainly personal. Only once Christ has forgiven Mure's personal sins can he become the spokesman for Protestantism. This view is in accordance with the ideas advanced in *The True Crucifixe*. It leads to the second and main movement, which is an impassioned appeal against the threatened strengthening of episcopacy. Mure skilfully centres his attack around certain dominant images. The first is, as we might expect, the ark of the covenant. The

¹ *Miscellany Volume*, p. 167, J. T. 6.

² Apocryphal sources were popular in early Scottish poetry. "The Pistill of Susan," *Scottish Alliterative Poems*, ed. F. J. Amours, Scottish Text Society (Edinburgh and London, 1897), pp. 172-87 is based on Apocryphal Daniel, Chap. 13.

idea of a federal theology had already a firm grip on the Scottish imagination, so Mure's use of the covenant image is no innovation.

The loss of the ark, he stresses, affects all men, young and old:

“I have a pleasant birth, yet I must cry
O Ichabod! O captive Ark once free!”¹

Ichabod (“the glory is departed”) was the name given by the wife of Phinehas to her son, because his birth coincided with the theft of the ark. This birth in the shadow of God's lost glory is set beside the death of Eli, as recounted in the same sonnet. Overcome by the ark's loss, he had died at the age of 98. Mure's point is clear. Scotland is about to desert her own covenant with God and that desertion will disastrously affect her entire population. This dual theme of the ark and the Covenant is repeated at intervals throughout the second movement:

“God's captive Ark I long to see restord (J.T.10)
My Covenant I charge her to renew (J.T.17)”²

It forms one of the dominant themes which interweave throughout this section.

The other *leitmotivs* of the sequence depend on the use of towns and bestial imagery respectively. The Protestant movement is consistently linked with Bethel and Sion, being set against the Babel or Babylon of other creeds. Only the weepers like Mure are forgiven, and in J.T.22 they are removed to Zoar, the one town in the Vale of Siddim saved from God's wrath. This neatly rounds off the “towns” theme, finding a compromise between the perfection of Sion and the degradation of Babylon. It also places Mure in a situation reconcilable with his state of redeemable imperfection, while putting his plea for Protestantism on a par with Lot's intercession on behalf of Zoar.

The frequent references to Babylon inevitably suggest sensuality and animalism, symbolised by Nebuchadnezzar's lycanthropy. Christ's first sonnet for example compares Scottish leanings towards increased episcopal government and Nebuchadnezzar's retreat to an animal existence:

“Ungrately hath shee gone from her first love:
Carnall respects have caused her of late
Forsake her crown, and the Beasts mark approve.”³

¹ *Miscellany Volume*, p. 167, J. T. 6.

² *Miscellany Volume*, p. 169; p. 173.

³ *Miscellany Volume*, p. 172, J. T. 16. Mure never has any hesitation in identifying Christ or God with the ultra-Protestant position.

Throughout the movement, animal imagery is used for those forces which Mure fears will damage the austerity of Scottish worship. The serpent of Rome has betrayed the lambs of God (*J.T.8*). Like Bashan's bulls the English try to hide the truth (*J.T.14*). Dogs and swine possess the Lord's holy place (*J.T.19*). This bestial imagery has a cumulative effect, reaching its peak in the outburst of *J.T.22*:

"All shee hath sold unto her enemie,
Her vomite she hath licked up again."¹

The ruling powers in the church are viewed in the most disgusting, bestial light possible. But Mure also points threateningly to the avarice which he believes is influencing their docile support to Charles. The bishops were after all royal nominees and already rumours were prevalent that the King proposed to restore property to the church in exchange for concessions from its leaders.

The result as Mure sees it is a state of chaos, expressed in the disorder imagery of *J.T.7*:

True Christ is bound, thief Barrabas assoid,
Esaw much praised, Iacob much disgracd.
The heritage of God is all defacd.²

As Alexander Montgomerie had done before him, he looks back to the Golden Age in *J.T.22*, the sonnet of Christ which gives the last word on so many themes. This time an "ubi sunt" motif is used:

Where is her light? her crown? her ornaments?
Her chain of love? her peace? her puritie?
Her fruitfull gardens? her fair continents?
Her rights? her seales of Life and Libertie?³

The state of religion as described by Mure in this movement is truly terrible. The perfection of the past is lamented in the "ubi sunt" sonnet, the present is depicted through disorder imagery, while the future prophecies of Amos (*J.T.9*) of Zephaniah (*J.T.7*) and of Jeremiah (*J.T.13*) are all ignored. The only hope proffered is that of Zoar, the small city of refuge reserved for those who bewail Charles's attack on the true kirk. It is in the third and final movement that a solution is offered.

Mure does this by taking up the story of Esther again. Christ confirms that "though Dragons fret and fume" they will be helpless in their attempts to overthrow God's kingdom. While dragons symbolised false religions in

¹ *Miscellany Volume*, p. 175.

² *Miscellany Volume*, p. 168.

³ *Miscellany Volume*, p. 175.

medieval exegesis, the particular reference is again to Mordecai's dream:

"Two great dragons came forward, both ready to fight against the nation of the righteous. And behold a day of darkness and gloom, tribulation and distress, affliction and great tumult upon the earth."¹

Thus when the poet makes his reference explicit in *J.T.25*:

Esther's example Saints encourage may²

his point is clear. The weak with God's aid may overcome the most awesome of opponents. Just as Esther saved the Jews from the might of King Ahasuerus, so a devout, committed group of Protestants may withstand Charles I. Only thus will "the Truth opprest" obtain "a blessed end".

The period between 1635 and 1640 was a crucial one for both Mure and Scotland. The new prayer book was introduced in 1637, causing a riot in St. Giles. Opposition to Charles's arbitrary handling of the situation grew, as he interfered in matters usually controlled by the General Assembly. The later months of that year were characterised by riots, often focussing on the Scottish bishops as a source of the grievances. This feeling of resentment culminated in the Covenant of 1638, which Mure enthusiastically supported. Then in 1639 a domestic event changed his role in the drama. His father died and he became Laird of Rowallan, one of the major Protestant leaders in Ayrshire. He proved a fierce enemy to the Catholics in that county. In 1641 for example he obtained from the Privy Council, a deed granting him "the right to pas, searche, seeke and take all and sundrie jesuits, seminarie and messe priests and excommunicat trafficqueing rebellious papists, quhair ever they may be apprehendit."³

It should be remembered that Charles's innovations were viewed by the Protestants as steps leading to Rome. The Negative Confession of 1581 with its attack on popery had opened the Covenant and one notes in Mure's verse that Catholicism and increased episcopal power are often interchangeable terms. His particular hatred of Bishops and Jesuits however may have had a more personal basis. In 1640 it had produced his third literary comment on political events.

Early in that year John Maxwell, Bishop of Ross and later Killala, had produced a clever and often perceptive tract entitled *The Epistle Congratulatorie of Lysimachus Nicanor, of the Societie of Jesu, to the Covenanter in Scotland, wherein is paralleled our sweet Harmony and Correspondency in divers materiall points of Doctrine and Practice*. Using a Jesuit "persona" Maxwell compared the Covenanting movement with the Holy League of

¹ *Apocryphal Esther*, Chap. 12.

² *Miscellany Volume*, p. 177.

³ *R.P.C.S.* (1638-43), 2nd series, VII, 291.

1576. Just as Loyola and the Holy League wished to expel Protestant princes from succession, so the Covenanters were aiming at dethroning the protestant Charles I. The irony and latent truthfulness behind his satire was to be underlined by later events. Mure without the advantage of foresight, indignantly sets out to deny any treacherous intent behind the Covenanters' actions. They accept Charles's divine right. He is a "sacred King" whose continued rule is guaranteed by the peace of "Eliza's raigne" and that of "thrice sacred James, that heaven-predestin'd one". Above all, however, he condemns the belief that their actions could ever result in dethronement:

Again thou says't we sympathize with thee,
And strive t'ecclypse the rayes of Majestie,
Pressing what's proper unto God Alone,
A Monarch's sacred person to dethrone;
Of independent power him to deprive,
And call in doubt his high prerogative,
To this our talion statute, we oppose,
Which doth as treason hatchers judge all those,
Who dare accuse, and cannot prove a treason.¹

Despite the surface flattery of Charles I and the reiterated theme of loyalty, Mure's defence of his position is not wholly logical. He may support a Protestant King and thus estrange himself from the Jesuits' position. Yet the claim of God is primary for both of them, and in this case it is directly opposed to Charles's will:

We supplicat for peace, we call, we crie,
Which if it please him (i.e. Charles) flatly to refuse,
By this necessity, we cannot chuse
But rise in lawfull armes and not neglect,
Religion, Laws, and Country to protect.²

Mure is thus refuting the satirical exaggeration, yet not defending Killala's main point. However loyal the Covenanters may be to Charles, their first loyalty to God may yet cause his dethronement.

Mure's emotional denouncement is no match for Maxwell's deeply pondered attack. The Scottish poet is unquestionably sincere, but he is content to gloss over the disastrous political consequences which might result from actions based on genuine religious conviction. Logic seems unnecessary to him, for God is placed *a priori* on his side and will surely guard the life of his appointed, albeit misguided, vassal. He thus appeals now to Charles, now to the law as chief guide of the Church in Scotland;

¹ *Works of Mure*, II, 7.

² *Works of Mure*, II, 9.

seems at one moment a Royalist, then in the next breath, anxious to placate the Parliamentarians:

Our King's chief ruler of the Church alone,
And hath such power in that government,
As is explain'd by acts of Parliament,
From which true Subjects never can debord.¹

Both sides could interpret these lines to their own advantage, and the *Counterbuff* is full of similar ambiguities. The truth is that Mure was unable fully to answer Nicanor's jibe that Charles is "onely executioner of laws", because to some extent he supported that viewpoint. He might be loyal to Charles but not when he openly flouted the laws of the General Assembly and the wishes of the Scottish parliament. He is thus at once supporting two ideas—loyalty to the crown and to the Covenant—when these are not always consistent.

The truth is that Mure and the Covenanters placed faith above logic, and thus were undisturbed by rational conflicts of the type cited. To Mure they are reconcilable because he believes God wills that they be reconciled. He believes that Charles I is undergoing a period of temporary blindness, but as divinely appointed King, his eyes will soon be opened. His continued rule is guaranteed by this as well as by the Tudor myth expounded at some length in the *Counterbuff*. When that moment comes, kingly approval for the Covenant will be added to divine and peace will rule the land again. This triple vision of Protestantism in Scotland, peace in Britain and Charles's reconciliation with his God is present in every one of Mure's poems before the execution. It represents the natural climax of the *Counterbuff*:

And now thou King of kings, inthron'd above,
By whom Kings raigne, by whom they live and move,
Inspire in my Prince' breast a sprite of peace,
And shoure on him thy favours and thy grace,
Command, Lord, thy Vice-gerent, tell him plain,
He should thy truth, and calme of peace maintain.²

The tragedy or glory of men like Mure was that they still basically held to the view that life on earth was only valuable as a metaphor for life in heaven. God's will was thus the key, not politics or rational argument. Mure fails to grapple with Maxwell's reasoning because he is blinded with indignation that anyone should doubt God's identification with the covenanting position. Also human reason cannot explain divine purpose, so that faith is the means to understanding. It is therefore wrong to see his flying passages as breaches

¹ *Works of Mure*, II, 13.

² *Works of Mure*, II, 16.

of decorum. They at once betray the emotional basis of his position and in their outspokenness indirectly emphasise his awe for God. Nicanor is a "swinish, base, pedantick slave", not because he opposes the Covenant, but because of his opposition to God's will as made manifest in that Covenant.

The *Counterbuff* clarifies both the intensity and the disregard for political realities which characterised the extreme Protestant position. On the other hand, Mure did believe that in this instance God wished his disciples to influence political decisions. It is at this period he began personally to take an interest in politics, being appointed to a parliamentary commission in September 1641.¹ This began an association with Parliament culminating in 1643 with his election as one of the M.P.s for Ayrshire.²

Shortly before this, however, he had indicated his approval of the Bishops War in a poem called *Caledon's Complaint*. It was composed in 1641 and sent to Charles I. Mure defends the Covenanters' right to take arms against an earthly King when he is opposing religious truth:

By Law, not force, wee move, not tumult make,
Wee Justice plead, Sedition doe forsake:
None with rebellion our attempts will brand,
But who themselves to crush Religion band,
By act or by intent.³

As his views had not changed materially two years later, this poem is also valuable as an insight into the attitudes held by Mure, when first he took his seat. The usual flattery for Charles is present, but there is a greater sense of impatience and frustration than before. The imagery of hellfire and disorder is stronger. He even dares to suggest that the head of the state is poisoned as well as its body. He complains of "violated Lawes" as well as "Religion vex'd and wrong'd". Two rhetorical passages, respectively praising unity and promising Scottish loyalty to Charles for foreign wars are split by a shorter, less flamboyant account of the Covenanters' major grievances. Cunningly concealed, it is nevertheless a forceful indictment against the King's policy:

That Thou thy royll Banners shouldest display,
By Justice' Sword, to make thy passion way,
Against a Nation from defection free,
Who heavens dare face, for their integritie;
O depth of woe! O hight of passing grieve!⁴

¹ *The Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland* (1625-41), V, 355.

² A.P.S. (1643-7), VI (1), 4.

³ *Works of Mure*, II, 21.

⁴ *Works of Mure*, II, 24.

To the extreme Covenanters, despite the complexity of the political situation, the major issues were still clearcut. The complete innocence of their cause stood out in white against the black of the opposition. In the Parliament of 1643, there were many members who must have seen the situation like Mure. Their patience was wearing thin.

On 29th November 1643 Scotland declared itself in favour of support for Parliament. She undertook to provide an army of 18,000 foot, 2,000 horse and 1,000 dragoons. In return she was promised £30,000 for maintenance. Thus was formed the Army of the Covenant, with Mure being one of those responsible for levying the Kyle and Carrick regiment.¹ He seems to have accompanied them south, for a letter written by him at the siege of Newcastle has been discovered. In it he confesses some concern for the upkeep of Rowallan in his absence:

“I have written to Adam Mure to whom yee shall also speake and
requeist that he must tak the whole cair and chairge of my harvest
and stay constantly at my house for that effect.²

As the Kyle regiment also served at York and Marston Moor he probably saw action there as well. But he lost faith in his English allies. Not only did they fail to provide adequate food and pay for the Scots, they also refused to establish religious uniformity. Mure thus found himself far from Rowallan, fighting against a King to whom he was really loyal, in alliance with enemies of the Covenant.

His activities in Parliament mirror this new mood of uncertainty. When the New Model Army was formed in February 1645 and Fairfax demanded Scottish aid, Mure was one of the M.P.s to advocate a compromise:

“That a pairt of the foirsaid great Comitie of estates abovenamed
remains with the Army in Ingland. And ane other pairt with the
Army within the kingdome and ane third pairt therof to stay at
Edr.” (Edinburgh).³

Mure stayed in Scotland. He was re-elected to the Committee of War on 2nd February 1646, but played only a minor role.⁴ It seems that he had become disillusioned with Parliament. The possibility of Nicanor's prophecy being fulfilled was becoming daily closer. When in 1649, the execution took place, Mure wrote a poetic comment on the event.

¹ “The Army of the Covenant”, *Scottish History Society*, 2nd series (Edinburgh, 1917), XVI, xxii, xxiii, xxxiii. A. P. S. VI (1), 50-4.

² *History of Rowallan*, ed. William Muir (Glasgow, 1825) p. 137.

³ A.P.S., VI (1), 382.

⁴ A.P.S., VI (1), 561.

From the foregoing we can anticipate some of his reactions. *The Counterbuff* and *Caledon's Complaint* had fiercely opposed the idea of dethronement, let alone execution. One would expect a cry of horror from the outraged Covenanter. It is on this note that his *Cry of Blood* addressed to Charles II, opens:

What horrid Actings force unwilling ears
With worst of news? do fancies and fond fears
Mock troubled minds? or doth a reall blow
For preface passe to Albion's overthrow?¹

His growing estrangement from the parliamentary cause prevents any identification with their interests, while his religion has always seen war as the natural means for divine punishment. It could fairly be assumed then that he would advocate war against the murderer of God's vassal. In a poem which contains separate addresses to all levels of Scottish opinion he counsels the army along these very lines:

"Never grounds more clear
For Noble action, did then now appear".²

But above all he must face up to one fact. He has misinterpreted the divine will. God has allowed Charles I to die. How can Mure fit this fact into God's beneficent scheme? In his address to "the faithful Ministry" he takes his stand on this point:

And last, from God's purposed destruction of obstinate revolters against Truth and lawfull Authority, however employed for our sins, as the rods of his just indignation.

God drives on designes
(In which, his Justice and deep wisdome shines)
By men, whose wills his hand leads on to act
His holy will, and guilty of the fact
Them holds, as having byass'd from his ends,
By other motions turn'd then he intends,
And all for their just ruine. Whence to fire
Shall Rods, when God's Commission doth expire.³

In this case Mure's argument is clever. He establishes that no man can fully know the divine purpose. This excuses his own error in the earlier verse. Then he argues that the Parliamentarians' earthly victory will be insignificant when compared to the spiritual torture God will exact for their sin. Then he interprets the temporary defeat as a divine signal to the Covenanters to fight and overcome the obstacles placed in their way. The

¹ *Works of Mure*, II, 33.

² *Works of Mure*, II, 38.

³ *Works of Mure*, II, 35.

newly drawn divine scheme thus reinforces the call to arms, which is the dominant theme of the poem.

A superficial reading of the *Cry of Blood* might suggest that Mure has undergone a serious change of viewpoint. His opposition to Charles I has become support of Charles II. His belief that God planned victory has turned to belief that God planned defeat. His enthusiasm for peace is transformed into a passionate plea for war. But all these changes can be seen as the application of old ideas to new facts. The power of the Covenant is still the motive power of the poem:

May all our Rulers, singly seek the ends,
Propos'd in Covenant with Thee.¹

Its appeal is still on behalf of Scotland specifically and its pristine innocence during the guilt-ridden conflict. Especially he defends the Scottish forces for relinquishing Charles I to the Parliamentarians at Newcastle. This he says was in part due to the King's obstinacy and in part to the false promises made by their English allies. He promises Scottish support to Charles II, as he had promised it to Charles I in *Caledon's Complaint*, with the same proviso as in the earlier poem:

"the Seal
Set to the holy Band, (A priviledge
To every King not Common) for a pledge
Of faith ingag'd shall serve, and clear thy way."²

This is perhaps the most striking feature of the *Cry of Blood*. Despite the poet's undoubted anguish at the news of Charles I's death he makes no concessions to Charles II, offers no apologies from the Covenanters and is more concerned with Scotland's innocence than England's guilt.

Charles II did eventually sign the Covenant, when all else had failed. Mure's war of holy vengeance however was of little effect, due to a splintering of the Scottish opposition and to effective defensive action by Cromwell. The Laird of Rowallan for his part became less aggressive and joined the more moderate Resolutioners. He was however nearly surrounded by extreme Covenanters in Ayrshire and there is evidence to show that he still afforded them his guarded support.³ His son was to continue the family's active covenanting traditions, holding conventicles in a secret room in Old Rowallan Castle, but Mure for the most part confined himself to domestic problems.

¹ *Works of Mure*, II, 51.

² *Works of Mure*, II, 43.

³ See *MS. Laing II*, 188, Edinburgh University Library, and G. Robertson, *Principal Families in Ayrshire* (Irvine, 1825), under "House of Rowallan".

His success in the more limited sphere of his lairdship is best expressed by his epitaph in *The History of Rowallan*:

"This Sir Wm. was pious & learned, & had ane excellent vaine in
poyesie; he delyted much in building and planting, he builded the
new wark in the north syde of the close, & the batlement of the back
wall, & reformed the whole house exceedingly. He lived Religiouslie,
& died Christianlie in the yeare of his age 63, and the year of [our]
lord 1657.¹

His story however highlights a number of points, both literary and historical. It shows how at this period the artist often used his verse for a social or political function. That this in many ways had a detrimental effect on its quality as poetry cannot be denied. For example, the need to complete a work before its theme lost topicality, led to hurried, slipshod craftsmanship. This can be seen even in his better works like *The Joy of Teares*. Its formal shape is wellnigh perfect. The argument has been preplanned and unity achieved through skilful use of *leitmotivs*. Yet the minor elements of metre and rhyme betray careless composition. Mure concentrates on the bigger effects, forgetting the details of effective writing. This defect is not nearly so noticeable in his non-political verse, so we may fairly assume that the urgency of controversy played its part in lessening the value of his work. The other major fault is the over-directness of all his covenanting verse. His message is so important that he cannot risk its being misunderstood. Imagery and associations are used only to exemplify arguments already advanced by unambiguous statement. In all but *The Joy of Teares* this results in overuse of abstractions, sermonizing techniques and explanatory annotation. Many of the poems studied would have made equally successful prose tracts. At the same time, Mure's obvious involvement in the issues, his skilful use of rhetoric to transmit a wide range of attitudes and his intelligent alternating between Scots and English give his verse an originality and power lacking in the mannerised, love-dominated poetry of the day. Both his strengths and his weaknesses may be traced to the unique nature of his inspiration, with one probably being the condition of the other.

Treated as a historical document, Mure's poetry reveals much about Covenanting attitudes. One learns first of all, how completely devoted to the idea of a federal theology Mure and his fellows were. The value of a Covenant is expounded in *The Joy of Teares*, years before the actual document. It remains the central issue when countering Nicanor, appealing to Charles I or advising Charles II. The Covenant is a symbol, a standard and a way of life. Both King and Parliament underestimated the Scottish Protestants'

¹ *Works of Mure*, II, 256.

fervent committedness to it. This in one case contributed to decapitation, in the other to a loss of powerful allies. A careful study of any of Mure's covenanting poems would have prevented this error.

The historian may also learn from these works that Mure did not view the Civil War or its consequences as he does. Mure's vision is narrower, more selective and more transcendental. His appeal is particularly for Scotland. Charles may act as he pleases until Scotland's interests become affected. Mure acts throughout as Scotland's apologist, judging King and Parliament solely through their handling of Scottish affairs. Indeed his attitude can be narrowed even further. He concerns himself only with Scotland's religious affairs. He does not see the scene in terms of Royalists and Parliamentarians, but as forces for and against the Covenant. Thus Royalists and Parliamentarians, Roman Catholics and Arminians become equated as enemies of the truth. On one level therefore Mure's war is a simple one. Many battles and decisions become irrelevant because they are non-Scottish, non-religious or non-covenanting. The subtle divisions of opinion as anti-Royalists grew more sympathetic to Charles are lost on Mure. One is either white or black, to use his own colour imagery; either wholeheartedly a Covenanter or one is not. To this extent his lens is sharp and distinct.

But he also sees events against a different background. Not the schemings of Charles, Fairfax or Cromwell, but the vast divine scheme is his constant preoccupation. The modern historian might see the King's position crumbling because of Parliament's control over the economy and its superior army discipline. Mure sees it guaranteed by the Tudor Myth, by Divine Right and by God's beneficence. Reason guides the historian as he watches the changing, chaotic political scene. Faith guides Mure as he observes the eternal, ordered divine scheme. The size of armies is nothing, for God is the only decisive ally. Thus he can brush aside Nicanor's arguments with the certainty of faith and consistently back a God-aided Scotland against the might of all opposing forces.

It is this faith, this certainty, which rings so clearly through all Mure's verse. The death of Charles astounded him as it astounded many others. He had preached the impossibility of the event in terms of God's benevolence, even refuting his arch-enemy Bishop Maxwell on the subject. Disillusion might have resulted. Yet, showing a faith and a technique comparable with Milton's he rises from despair to greater certainty. The setback is a fierce test of the faithful. Yet with Samson-like strength they may rise in their weakness, vanquish the hordes of false worshippers and re-establish truth with a greater maturity born of suffering. This is Mure's personal victory in his "Holy War", and who can deny that he deserved it?